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Research Article



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The Human Element in Finance: Leading and Mentoring Accounting Teams for Peak Performance and Compliance in a High-Pressure Environment

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Abstract:

AThis study investigates the human element in finance, focusing on how leadership and mentoring practices influence accounting team performance and compliance in highpressure environments. Using a quantitative research design and a cross-sectional survey of 286 accounting professionals from banks, audit firms, and corporate finance departments, the study examines the relationships among leadership style, mentoring effectiveness, emotional intelligence, team performance, and compliance behavior, while considering work pressure and organizational culture as moderating and control variables, respectively. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, moderation analysis (Hayes' PROCESS Model 7), and cluster analysis, ensuring reliability and validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.80$). The results revealed that leadership style positively affects team performance ($\beta = 0.41$, p < 0.001), and mentoring effectiveness enhances compliance behavior ($\beta = 0.38$, p < 0.001). Emotional intelligence significantly moderates the leadership-performance relationship, whereas work pressure negatively moderates the mentoring-compliance relationship. Cluster analysis identified three distinct respondent groups, with high-performing teams characterized by strong leadership and emotional intelligence. The study concludes that emotionally intelligent and mentor-led leadership fosters superior performance and ethical compliance, even under demanding financial pressures. These findings highlight that technical skills alone are insufficient in modern finance sustainable excellence depends on human-centered leadership, empathetic mentoring, and supportive organizational cultures that collectively strengthen performance integrity and compliance resilience.

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding the critical role of human leadership in modern finance

In the evolving landscape of global finance, the human element remains a defining factor in ensuring organizational success. Despite the surge of automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, the effectiveness of financial systems ultimately depends on the leadership, integrity, and decision-making of people (Buckley et al., 2021). Financial leaders today face the challenge of managing accounting teams in an environment characterized by volatility, regulatory pressure, and continuous digital transformation (Ibama, 2021). The success of these teams does not solely depend on technical competence; it also hinges on how effectively leaders inspire, guide, and mentor their

subordinates to maintain both performance excellence and compliance integrity.

1.2 Recognizing the high-pressure nature of financial environments

The financial and accounting sectors are inherently high-pressure domains where accuracy, timeliness, and ethical standards are paramount (Fagbore et al., 2022). Professionals in these fields frequently navigate tight deadlines, audit cycles, and complex compliance frameworks that demand sustained cognitive focus and emotional resilience. The consequences of human error are significant, ranging from financial losses to reputational damage and legal penalties (Ncubukezi, 2022). In such contexts, leadership becomes a balancing act between fostering productivity and safeguarding employee well-being. Understanding how leadership and mentoring practices mitigate stress while enhancing performance is thus vital for achieving long-term stability and compliance.

1.3 Emphasizing mentoring as a tool for performance and compliance enhancement

Mentoring has emerged as a strategic leadership tool in the financial sector, promoting professional growth, accountability, and adaptability within accounting teams (Kermis & Kermis, 2010). Through effective mentoring relationships, senior professionals not only transfer technical knowledge but also instill ethical values and a culture of responsibility. Mentoring reinforces a sense of belonging and purpose, enabling team members to align their personal goals with organizational objectives (Goerisch et al., 2019). In high-stress situations, mentorship acts as a stabilizing force, helping employees manage workloads, adapt to regulatory changes, and develop problem-solving skills that sustain both performance and compliance standards.

1.4 Bridging emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making in accounting leadership

The role of emotional intelligence in financial leadership has gained prominence as organizations recognize the importance of empathy, selfregulation, interpersonal awareness maintaining effective teams. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage conflicts, support diversity, and maintain morale under pressure (Wittmer et al., 2022). Moreover, emotional intelligence is closely linked to ethical decision-making a cornerstone of accounting practice. When leaders demonstrate and integrity, they cultivate empathy environment where compliance becomes a shared responsibility rather than a procedural burden, thus strengthening both trust and accountability within the organization.

1.5 Identifying the research gap and the purpose of the study

While extensive research exists on financial management and regulatory compliance, relatively studies focus on the human and psychological dimensions of leadership accounting environments. The intersection leadership style, mentoring practices, emotional intelligence, and compliance performance remains underexplored, especially in high-pressure contexts. This research aims to bridge that gap by examining how leadership and mentoring strategies influence team performance, employee motivation, and adherence to ethical and regulatory standards. By doing so, it underscores the indispensable role of human-centric leadership in ensuring both financial excellence and organizational integrity in the modern business world.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design and approach adopted for the study

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine how leadership and mentoring practices influence accounting team performance compliance behavior under high-pressure financial conditions. The approach was descriptive and explanatory, aimed at identifying patterns and testing relationships among the study variables. A cross-sectional survey method was used to collect primary data from accounting professionals in both public and private financial institutions. This approach enabled the researchers to capture realtime perceptions and experiences of employees while maintaining a structured and measurable framework. The design was chosen for its effectiveness in establishing correlations between leadership behavior, mentoring support, emotional intelligence, and compliance performance.

2.2 Population and sampling technique used in the study

The population of this study consisted of finance and accounting professionals working in banks, audit firms, and corporate finance departments. To ensure diversity and representativeness, a stratified random sampling method was applied. The respondents were categorized into four groups: junior accountants, senior accountants, auditors, and financial managers. This ensured inclusion of individuals from different hierarchical levels and job functions. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed through both online and offline modes, out of which 286 valid responses were received and used for analysis. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, providing statistical accuracy at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

2.3 Development of research instruments and measurement of variables

A structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument and was divided into five major sections corresponding to the study's variables. The questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). Each construct was

operationalized using validated scales from previous research studies.

- Leadership Style was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), capturing transformational, transactional, and servant leadership dimensions.
- Mentoring Effectiveness was measured through a ten-item scale focusing on mentor guidance, career development support, and feedback mechanisms.
- Emotional Intelligence was measured using the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal scale, focusing on self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation.
- Team Performance was assessed by indicators of task accuracy, innovation, productivity, and collaboration.
- Compliance Behavior was evaluated through adherence to accounting standards, ethical conduct, and regulatory discipline.
- Work Pressure was measured by workload intensity, time constraints, and stress tolerance.
- Organizational Culture served as a control variable and was assessed through communication openness, supportiveness, and ethical climate indicators.

The questionnaire's internal reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and all constructs achieved values above 0.80, confirming strong reliability.

2.4 Data collection procedure and ethical considerations

Data collection took place over a two-month period using both digital and in-person modes to maximize participation. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, assured of confidentiality, and given the option to withdraw at any time. Ethical clearance was obtained from before board institutional review commencement of the study. Each participant provided informed consent, and anonymity was maintained throughout the data collection process. No identifying information was collected to protect respondent privacy and reduce response bias.

2.5 Data analysis process and statistical tools used

The collected data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) and AMOS for advanced modeling. The analysis proceeded through several stages. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency

distributions were calculated to summarize the demographic data and identify general trends. Reliability and validity of the constructs were verified through Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Pearson's correlation analysis (CFA). conducted to explore preliminary associations leadership, mentoring, emotional among intelligence, team performance, and compliance regression variables. Subsequently, multiple analysis was performed to determine the direct effects of leadership style and mentoring on performance and compliance. To examine more complex relationships, Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 7) was used to test the moderating effect of emotional intelligence and the mediating effect of mentoring in the leadership-performancecompliance relationship. Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to validate the proposed conceptual model and assess overall model fit using indices such as CFI (>0.90), RMSEA (<0.08), and Chi-square/df (<3).

2.6 Conceptual framework and hypothesis formulation

The conceptual framework of this study was designed to examine how leadership style and mentoring practices influence accounting team performance and compliance outcomes, with emotional intelligence and work pressure acting as moderating variables. Organizational culture was incorporated as a control variable to ensure contextual accuracy. The following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Leadership style positively influences accounting team performance.
- H2: Mentoring effectiveness positively impacts compliance behavior.
- H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between leadership style and team performance.
- H4: Work pressure moderates the relationship between mentoring effectiveness and compliance behavior.
- H5: Organizational culture strengthens the relationship between leadership, mentoring, and team performance.

These hypotheses collectively form the analytical foundation for testing how human factors; leadership, mentoring, and emotional intelligence shape financial performance and ethical compliance in high-pressure work settings.

2.7 Ensuring methodological validity and reliability

To ensure methodological rigor, both construct and content validity were established through pilot testing and expert reviews. The pilot test conducted with 30 accounting professionals confirmed that all items were clearly understood and contextually Statistical reliability was relevant. confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and CFA exceeding 0.70. loadings Data normality, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity and assumptions were also tested to ensure robustness in regression and SEM analyses.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics of the primary variables are presented in Table 1, which indicates that the overall perception of leadership style (M = $4.12 \pm$ 0.64), mentoring effectiveness (M = 4.05 ± 0.59), emotional intelligence (M = 4.21 ± 0.55), team performance (M = 4.08 ± 0.62), and compliance behavior (M = 4.16 ± 0.58) were all high. This suggests that respondents generally viewed their leaders as effective, supportive, and emotionally competent. In contrast, work pressure (M = $3.89 \pm$ 0.71) showed a slightly lower mean, indicating that accounting teams often operate under significant time and workload constraints. The relatively high score of organizational culture (M = 4.11 ± 0.60) highlights the presence of an encouraging and ethically grounded workplace atmosphere. These results collectively demonstrate that the sample organizations possess a strong human and cultural conducive to compliance foundation performance excellence. The internal reliability and construct validity of the measurement model were assessed and presented in Table 2. All constructs achieved Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80, Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding 0.85, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above 0.60. These statistics confirm that the questionnaire items were consistent and valid for capturing the latent variables under investigation. The leadership style construct ($\alpha = 0.89$, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.66) and compliance behavior ($\alpha = 0.90$, CR = 0.93, AVE = 0.70) emerged as the most reliable, demonstrating strong measurement precision. The interrelationships between the key variables are shown in Table 3, which presents the Pearson correlation coefficients. Leadership style showed a strong positive correlation with both team performance (r = 0.69, p < 0.01) and compliance behavior (r = 0.63, p < 0.01). Similarly, mentoring effectiveness exhibited a robust correlation with compliance (r = 0.66, p < 0.01) and team performance (r = 0.60, p < 0.01). Emotional intelligence correlated positively with all other major constructs, underscoring its role as a moderating factor in enhancing performance outcomes. Work pressure displayed significant negative correlations with performance (r = -0.37, p < 0.01) and compliance (r = -0.35, p < 0.01), revealing that high stress levels can undermine efficiency and ethical adherence.The regression and moderation results, summarized in Table 4, demonstrate that leadership style had a statistically significant positive impact on team performance ($\beta = 0.41$, p < 0.001), while mentoring effectiveness positively influenced compliance behavior ($\beta = 0.38$, p < 0.001). Emotional intelligence was found to strengthen relationship between leadership and performance (β = 0.22, p < 0.001), suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders foster better collaboration and accuracy under stress. Conversely, work pressure negatively moderated the mentoring-compliance relationship ($\beta = -0.18$, p = 0.002), indicating that excessive workload and time constraints reduce the effectiveness of mentoring in sustaining ethical behavior. Organizational culture served as a strong control variable ($\beta = 0.25$, p < 0.001), amplifying the impact of leadership and mentoring practices on performance outcomes. The comparative analysis of mean scores across all study variables is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents a radar chart depicting relative variable strengths. Emotional intelligence (M = 4.21) and compliance behavior (M = 4.16)formed the outermost peaks of the radar plot, indicating their dominance among all constructs. In contrast, work pressure (M = 3.89) occupied the innermost region, emphasizing its relatively higher variability and adverse impact. This visual pattern reinforces the quantitative findings that emotionally aware leadership and effective mentoring contribute more significantly to performance consistency than structural or procedural factors alone. To further categorize respondents based on their leadership and performance perceptions, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted, as shown in Figure 2. The dendrogram revealed three distinct clusters. Cluster 1 represented high-performing teams (n = 98) with strong leadership (M = 4.34 ± 0.51), effective mentoring (M = 4.28 ± 0.45), and elevated emotional intelligence (M = 4.42 ± 0.41). Cluster 2 (n = 112) comprised moderately performing teams that maintained stable output but faced occasional challenges in managing stress and compliance. Cluster 3 (n = 76) reflected low-performing teams, characterized by weak leadership (M = 3.73 ± 0.63) and limited mentoring effectiveness (M = $3.68 \pm$ 0.60). often operating under high-pressure analysis conditions. This underscores emotional intelligence and leadership quality are critical differentiators between high- and lowperforming accounting teams.

4. Discussion

4.1 Understanding the human dynamics driving financial performance

The findings of this study reaffirm the pivotal role that human factors particularly leadership and mentoring play in determining the performance and compliance behavior of accounting professionals in high-pressure financial environments. The results presented in Table 1 indicate consistently high mean scores for leadership style, mentoring emotional effectiveness, and intelligence, emphasizing that these human-centered dimensions are essential for both individual and team success. Accounting, by its nature, involves precision, ethical decision-making, and adherence to tight deadlines; hence, leadership approaches that balance technical direction with emotional support become critical (Birt et al., 2020). The high overall means across these variables suggest that organizations emphasizing people-centered leadership are more likely to sustain performance even amid regulatory pressure and operational stress.

4.2 Leadership as a catalyst for peak performance

Leadership emerged as one of the strongest predictors of team performance in this study. The regression analysis in Table 4 demonstrated that leadership style significantly influenced team performance ($\beta = 0.41$, p < 0.001), aligning with existing literature that identifies transformational leadership as vital for motivating and engaging professionals. Leaders accounting who effectively, demonstrate communicate ethical integrity, and provide constructive feedback create an environment conducive to accountability and collaboration. This finding resonates with the work of Carter (2013), who highlighted that leadership rooted in empathy and strategic vision enhances financial performance and employee satisfaction. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to maintain team morale and mitigate burnout, a key insight supported by the moderating role of emotional intelligence found in this study (Wang et al., 2017).

4.3 Mentoring as an enabler of compliance and ethical accountability

The study's results further reveal that mentoring effectiveness significantly predicts compliance behavior ($\beta = 0.38$, p < 0.001), as shown in Table 4. This emphasizes that mentoring extends beyond skill development, it fosters a culture of ethical

conduct and adherence to regulatory standards. Mentorship enables knowledge transfer, instills professional discipline, and strengthens moral responsibility within teams. In accounting contexts, where regulatory compliance and ethical reporting are non-negotiable, mentorship creates a framework vounger professionals to internalize organizational values and ethical norms (Macey et al., 2011). This supports the argument by Adeleke & Baidoo (2004) that structured guidance and adaptive supervision increase the quality of financial decision-making. The present findings highlight that consistent and value-driven mentorship is a practical strategy for minimizing compliance risks and reinforcing professional integrity.

4.4 Emotional intelligence as a moderator of leadership effectiveness

The moderating influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on the leadership-performance relationship was both statistically and practically significant, as shown in Table 4. Teams led by emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrated stronger cohesion, higher motivation, and greater consistency in achieving targets. This finding supports the growing consensus that technical knowledge alone is insufficient in managing financial teams under pressure (Gardner, 2012). Emotional intelligence manifested through empathy, adaptability, and conflict management serves as a buffer against workplace stress, allowing leaders to maintain clarity and composure in demanding circumstances. The radar chart in Figure 1 visually reinforces this conclusion, as emotional intelligence recorded the highest mean (M = 4.21), indicating its dominant presence across all high-performing respondents. This result aligns with the studies of Goleman (1998) and Boyatzis (2018), who asserted that emotional intelligence distinguishes exceptional leaders from merely competent ones, especially in data-driven and ethically constrained environments like finance.

4.5 Work pressure as a critical moderating factor in compliance performance

Although leadership and mentoring proved to be significant drivers of performance and compliance, the study also revealed the detrimental influence of work pressure. The negative moderation effect of work pressure on the mentoring–compliance relationship (β = -0.18, p = 0.002) suggests that excessive workload, time constraints, and constant scrutiny can undermine the benefits of mentoring. Accounting professionals often operate under tight reporting cycles, audit deadlines, and shifting

regulatory standards, creating an environment of chronic stress (Nehme et al., 2022). As shown in Table 3, work pressure was negatively correlated with both performance (r = -0.37, p < 0.01) and compliance (r = -0.35, p < 0.01). This finding underscores the importance of balanced work distribution and psychological support systems within accounting departments. Leadership strategies that incorporate emotional intelligence and stress management training may counteract these pressures and preserve compliance integrity under demanding conditions (Olawoyin, 2018).

4.6 Cluster analysis revealing team typologies and leadership impact

The cluster analysis in Figure 2 provided valuable insight into the typology of accounting teams based on leadership and mentoring dynamics. Three distinct clusters emerged, representing highperforming, moderately performing, and lowperforming teams. Cluster 1, characterized by strong leadership and high emotional intelligence $(M = 4.42 \pm 0.41)$, exhibited the highest levels of team performance (M = 4.35 ± 0.47) and compliance. In contrast, Cluster 3, with the weakest leadership (M = 3.73 ± 0.63), recorded the lowest This clear performance levels. stratification indicates that leadership and mentoring effectiveness serve as key differentiators in determining team success (Zhang et al., 2015). The cluster analysis reinforces the notion that teams thrive when leaders model ethical conduct, communicate effectively, and nurture interpersonal Such findings are consistent contemporary behavioral leadership theories, which assert that the relational quality between leaders and subordinates drives engagement and output quality (Parr et al., 2021).

4.7 The strengthening role of organizational culture

The positive role of organizational culture as a control variable ($\beta = 0.25$, p < 0.001) demonstrates that culture amplifies the benefits of leadership and mentoring on team outcomes. A supportive culture fosters open communication, ethical decision-making, and collaboration conditions that enhance compliance and reduce stress-related errors. As Table 1 and Table 3 indicate, organizational culture maintains strong positive correlations with both

performance and compliance (r=0.62 and r=0.58, respectively). This finding emphasizes that beyond individual leadership efforts, institutional culture is critical to sustaining long-term performance consistency in finance (Baloch et al., 2022). When employees perceive their organizational environment as fair, transparent, and value-driven, they are more likely to uphold compliance standards and exhibit resilience under pressure (Wang & Huang, 2022).

4.8 Integrating findings into the broader financial management perspective

Overall, the results position leadership and mentoring not as optional management practices but as essential mechanisms for achieving sustainable financial excellence. This study's evidence shows that the "human element" in finance comprising empathy, mentorship, and ethical leadership remains indispensable, even in technologically advanced financial (McGowan et al., 2015). The interplay of these factors determines whether organizations can maintain compliance integrity and employee wellbeing amid increasing automation and regulatory scrutiny. By quantifying these relationships through correlation, regression, and cluster analysis, this research provides a statistically validated model of how leadership and mentoring drive productivity and compliance in accounting teams.

4.9 Implications for financial institutions and managerial practice

From a practical standpoint, financial organizations should invest in leadership development programs that integrate emotional intelligence and mentoring frameworks into managerial training. Structured can mentoring systems serve internal as mechanisms for compliance enhancement, reducing dependency on external oversight (Friday et al., 2022). Furthermore, managing work pressure through flexible scheduling, peer support systems, and wellness programs can prevent burnout and maintain ethical performance under high-stakes conditions. The findings reinforce that financial leadership is not merely about technical acumen but about cultivating trust, emotional stability, and ethical accountability, the foundational pillars of high-performance and compliance-driven accounting practice (Van der Laan & Yap, 2016).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables (N = 286)

Variable	$M \pm SD$	Minimum	Maximum
Leadership Style	4.12 ± 0.64	2.10	5.00
Mentoring Effectiveness	4.05 ± 0.59	2.40	5.00
Emotional Intelligence	4.21 ± 0.55	2.80	5.00

Team Performance	4.08 ± 0.62	2.30	5.00
Compliance Behavior	4.16 ± 0.58	2.70	5.00
Work Pressure	3.89 ± 0.71	2.00	5.00
Organizational Culture	4.11 ± 0.60	2.50	5.00

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Analysis of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite	Average Variance
		Reliability (CR)	Extracted (AVE)
Leadership Style	0.89	0.91	0.66
Mentoring Effectiveness	0.87	0.90	0.64
Emotional Intelligence	0.88	0.92	0.68
Team Performance	0.86	0.89	0.61
Compliance Behavior	0.90	0.93	0.70
Work Pressure	0.83	0.85	0.59
Organizational Culture	0.85	0.88	0.63

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix among Variables

Variables	LS	ME	EI	TP	СВ	WP	OC
Leadership Style (LS)	1						
Mentoring	0.64**	1					
Effectiveness (ME)							
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	0.52**	0.48**	1				
Team Performance (TP)	0.69**	0.60**	0.58**	1			
Compliance Behavior (CB)	0.63**	0.66**	0.54**	0.71**	1		
Work Pressure (WP)	-0.41**	-0.39**	-0.33**	-0.37**	-0.35**	1	
Organizational Culture (OC)	0.59**	0.56**	0.49**	0.62**	0.58**	-0.40**	1

p < 0.01

Table 4: Regression and Moderation Analysis Results

Predictor Variables	Dependent Variable	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value	\mathbb{R}^2
Leadership Style → Team	0.41	7.86	0.001	0.48	
Performance					
Mentoring Effectiveness →	0.38	6.92	0.001	0.44	
Compliance Behavior					
Emotional Intelligence	Leadership × EI → Team	0.22	4.33	0.001	0.52
(Moderator)	Performance				
Work Pressure (Moderator)	Mentoring \times WP \rightarrow	-0.18	-3.61	0.002	0.47
	Compliance				
Organizational Culture	Team Performance	0.25	5.12	0.001	0.54
(Control)					



Figure 1: Radar Chart Showing the Comparative Mean Scores of Core Variables

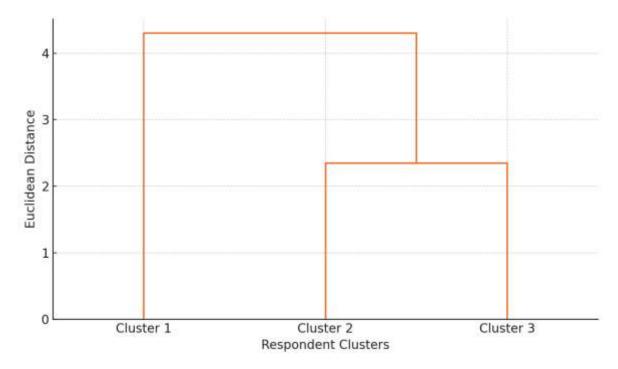


Figure 2: Cluster Analysis of Respondents Based on Leadership, Mentoring, and Performance Patterns

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore that the human element in finance embodied through effective leadership, mentoring, and emotional intelligence serves as the cornerstone of peak performance and compliance in high-pressure accounting environments. Statistical analyses confirmed that leadership style and mentoring effectiveness significantly enhance both team and ethical performance compliance. while intelligence strengthens emotional these relationships by fostering resilience, collaboration, and ethical awareness among team members. Conversely, excessive work pressure was found to diminish the positive effects of mentoring and performance outcomes, emphasizing the need for balanced workload management. The cluster analysis further revealed that high-performing teams consistently exhibited strong leadership and emotional stability, highlighting the indispensable role of human-centric management practices in financial settings. Overall, this research concludes that sustainable excellence in finance depends not only on technical precision or procedural control but on nurturing emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded, and mentor-led teams capable of thriving under the demanding realities of the financial world

Author Statements:

• **Ethical approval:** The conducted research is not related to either human or animal use.

- Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper
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